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SOME CHINESE FEARS

By BINGHAM DAI

THAT AMERICAN CULTURE will exert an unprecedented influence all over the world after the war is a foregone conclusion. American political, economic, religious, educational and social ideology and institutions will be everywhere set up as the models to be copied. These aggressive cultural activities will not be confined to the territories temporarily occupied by Americans but will be introduced into free countries as well. And what is more interesting, most likely these cultural "invasions" will not be resisted; they will be welcome. All this, to be sure, applies to a certain extent to the cultures of other future Allied victors as well—the British, the Russian, and to a less extent the Chinese. But it is somewhat disconcerting to observe that the cultural prestige of these various nations seems to be roughly proportional to their fighting strength and their usefulness in the field of battle.

The reason for high-lighting this possible phenomenon is that at the present stage of human development no one culture can be considered as ideal and whenever cultural exchange between nations takes the form of a one-way traffic grave consequences are due to follow. In the first place, the defects of a dominating culture may and often do go along with its assets to the detriment of all concerned. In the second place, the assets of the dominated or less assertive cultures may be thus neglected or lost to mankind forever. The gravity of this situation in regard to world peace lies in the possibility that the dominating culture or cultures in any period may contain elements that incite and perpetuate individual combativeness and group strife, while the less dominating or dominated culture or cultures—such as the Arapesh culture, according to reliable anthropological reports—may contain the very elements that are conducive to peace and cooperation.

To be more specific and at the risk of being taken to be an overly severe critic of American culture, I venture to say that I would hesitate to see the following American cultural elements assume any greater prestige in the postwar period

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than they have already enjoyed: namely, American race prejudice and the American grandiose conception of the Christian religion.

That race prejudices of any kind are highly undesirable in the new world that is emerging is something no thinking people will dispute. But they seem so deeply rooted in the mores of the Anglo-Saxon countries, especially among the Americans, that even the exigency of the war has not prevented racial riots of the most serious nature among both civilian workers and armed men, who are supposed to fight the very evil of racial superiority on the part of the Axis. Like other national vices, race prejudice seldom remains a purely domestic problem; it invariably tends to color a people's attitude toward the war and the peace as well as their relation with other peoples or races, and since the Anglo-American prestige is apt to increase greatly after the war, there is even the grim possibility of its being adopted by other peoples together with the more salient elements of the British and American culture patterns.

Preoccupation with Skin Color

For example, in an effort to arouse righteous hatred of the Japanese militarists after Pearl Harbor, many Americans, including some well-known radio commentators and newspaper writers and even high government officials, unthinkingly referred to the Japanese as "yellow dogs" or "yellow wasps" or the "little men with brown eyes." If it were not for the fact that their Chinese allies also have yellow skin and brown eyes, the American masses would easily have been led to believe that this is a racial war—a war between the yellow and white peoples. Even at the present moment, intelligent and well-meaning American newspapermen almost never fail to describe the activities of Americans or Britishers in the Far East as those of the "white men." Very few of these otherwise international-minded people seem to notice that in China the designation "white men" is almost never used; people from other lands are always known either categorically as foreigners or specifically by their nationality, such as Americans or Britishers. One of the possible consequences of this persistent and pernicious preoccupation with their skin color on the part of Americans in relation to China will be that the Chinese, in the course of time, will

be made to react in the same manner and recognize a distinction which to them did not exist. In fact, not a few Chinese living in the United States, including some of the intellectuals, have come to share the popular American prejudices against Negroes and Jews. Indeed, race prejudice must be considered as a social epidemic in the full sense of the word; like any other epidemic, it tends to spread unless effectively checked.

Grandiose Ideas about Religion

The very prevalent American preoccupation with the Christian religion as the best and the most complete of all religions is another trait I would hesitate to see spread abroad after the war. For, if to evaluate human beings on the basis of their skin color is bad, to judge them according to one's own religious belief is no better. Both are undemocratic, if by "democratic" we really mean the respect of the individual man as man, irrespective of race, nationality, creed or any other individual or group idiosyncrasy on the part of those temporarily in power.

No less a United Nations leader than Lord Halifax has repeatedly declared that we were engaged in a war to save the Christian civilization. In so doing, he only expressed in an emphatic form the innumerable utterances to the same effect made by Christian leaders throughout the United States and Great Britain. If the listeners were to take these pronouncements literally, I wonder how they would think of the four hundred million heathen Chinese allies, for they are fighting neither for the Christian civilization nor the Buddhist civilization nor even the Confucian civilization; they fight only for humanity—for freedom and equality of all men. And the same may be said of other millions of Hindus and Mohammedans. Equally questionable is the constantly repeated assertion among church circles that peace in the postwar world can be built only on the basis of the teachings of the Christian religion. It is perhaps necessary to remind ourselves that the most destructive wars in the world's history have been waged by the Christian countries, whereas there are people still existent who either have no interest in war whatsoever or are incapable of waging a war, but who have never heard of the Christian religion.

The Hopelessly Mundane Chinese

Recently there has been much ado among well-meaning Christian friends of China about the fact that some of the Chinese leaders are Christians or that Christianity is becoming popular among some quarters in war-time China—as though their own religious beliefs were the uni-

versally accepted standards for measuring the worth of the leaders of another people. Little do they know that some of these Christian leaders in China whom they so patronize may be just as much Confucian or even Buddhist as they are Christian. Still less do they realize, if at all, that for the Chinese as a people to become Christians would be tantamount to the end of the Chinese civilization that they sometimes admire in their less religious moments. For while all the religions agree, to an extent not yet recognized, regarding human values, from the standpoint of the fundamental cultural pattern of a nation there is nothing more alien to the typical Chinese mind than the Christian teachings regarding sin and redemption, the supernatural in general and Christology in particular. The Chinese on the whole are hopelessly mundane and have a love of this life that their material conditions sometimes do not justify; but to be less so would mean to stop being Chinese. The effects of Christianity upon the personality structure of non-Christian peoples is a subject that is generally avoided in the United States but one that is in need of the most painstaking investigation, for it has been too much taken for granted that the Christian religion, an agglomerate compound of Jewish, European and American cultural ingredients, is good for all mankind.

On the credit side, of course, there is much in American culture that other peoples may borrow with profit, if such borrowing is done intelligently. I refer especially to the American skill in the use of the machine or technology, industrial organization and the ideals of political democracy. There is no question that American technology will spread far and wide throughout the world, because it is essentially a tool and is thereby relatively divorced of cultural valuations. And for this very reason whether the results of this borrowing will be conducive to world peace or not will depend a great deal on the pattern of the culture that does the borrowing. The sinister use feudal Japan makes of modern western technology is a neat example.

But when we come to the borrowing of the American economic and political systems, the question is far from simple. Few will deny that the American economic structure is primarily motivated by competition and the desire for private profit instead of cooperation and the consideration of common welfare. Nor can it be much disputed that the American political system, with its endless and wasteful conflicts between the principal functions of the government even during periods of grave national crisis and with party politics and the consideration of votes

playing an unusually important role in determining questions of great national and international importance, is far from being perfect. Yet here in America one often hears severe criticism—in fact, not seldom vehement dislike—of other economic and political systems mainly on the ground that they are “un-American” and thereby undemocratic, for in the American popular mind these two terms have become interchangeable. If this form of extreme ethnocentricism continues, the Americans will find it difficult to understand and appreciate the Russian and the Chinese cultures, for example. The result will be increasing conflict—instead of genuine collaboration.

The American Superiority Obsession

When one stops to think about the way in which a great many Americans are obsessed with the superiority of their race, religion, and their economic and political systems, one cannot help asking whether underneath all these obsessions there is not a basic national character or personality structure that is essentially combative and that is characterized by a tremendous urge toward absolute certainty or perfection and undisputed success—psychological tendencies that may or may not be the stuff out of which world peace is made. How this urge comes about, and what would happen if the Americans should come in contact with people with equally strong urges toward mastery and success, or if this urge should become the common possession of peoples across the Pacific Ocean, let us say, are some of the problems that are worth the closest attention.

My reason for dwelling at such length on American culture is my belief that, whether the Americans like it or not, they are going to play the leading role in the postwar world and their cultural pattern and their personality constellation are going to exert an influence the magnitude of which few of them have yet fully realized. In more than one sense this is what some have called “the American century.” My comments, if critical, come not out of disrespect but rather from my sense of the immense cultural responsibilities of the Americans which are associated with their increasing power and prestige.

Another significant cultural development that is due to take place after the war will be closer contact between eastern and western cultures, which may be in the form of conflict or collaboration, depending on how the situation is met by the parties concerned. It is time, therefore, that students of culture should begin asking what the fundamental cultural patterns in the Orient are and whether there are assets in its various cultures that may contribute not only toward world peace

but toward the building of a world civilization. We may use Chinese culture again for illustration.

Cultural contact between China and the West in the past hundred years has gone through various stages. But it is not necessary to recall all the unhappy details to realize that a golden chance of mutually profitable exchange of cultural assets has been irretrievably lost, for while China has been more or less forced to learn something from the West, the West has not profited at all from the century-old contact with China except perhaps in the form of material exploits. With China today playing a prominent role in this war against aggression, however, this one-way traffic in the world's cultural commodities seems certain to undergo some change for the better, however slow. Following are some observable facts of Chinese cultural history that may be of interest to students of postwar intercultural collaboration.

In the first place, it is a fact of great cultural significance that ever since the abolition of feudalism and the establishment of a regime emphasizing Confucian teachings—that is the Han Dynasty—some two hundred years before the Christian era, the Chinese have been almost always on the defensive rather than the offensive in relation to their warring neighbors. The unmistakable symbol of this attitude is the famed Great Wall. The martial spirit and fighting strength of the Chinese have steadily declined throughout the centuries, and, as a result, they have periodically succumbed to invasions by tribes with much inferior culture.

Chinese Children Don't Fight Back

This consistently defensive attitude and lack of military preparedness have been the result of a pattern of life that encourages peace and harmony and discourages the use of brute force in the settling of disputes—a pattern that quite naturally puts the scholar on the top of the Chinese social hierarchy and that in normal times finds little use for the professional bearer of arms. In both England and America, I understand, a boy or girl involved in a quarrel is expected to fight back provided the fighting is fair and the opponent is his or her own size. In China, however, fighting among children is generally banned by both parents and school-teachers, no matter which side is right and no matter whether the opponent is of the same size or not. Even when a boy is attacked, he is taught not to fight back but to bring the matter either to the opponent's relatives or his own. In this connection one cannot help recalling China's naive reliance on the League of Nations in the days of the so-called Mukden Incident and her repeated appeals to the League's Assembly

in the hope of bringing Japan to justice without putting up a fight. Indeed the Chinese seem to fight best when they are attacked and have no higher authority to appeal to, for then and only then the cultural injunction not to fight at all no longer holds them back.

A second interesting cultural fact about the Chinese, one not unconnected with their lack of military aggressiveness, is their failure to develop racism in spite of their once notorious ethnocentrism. In other words, although the Chinese, because of their long cultural history, have at times felt more or less superior to their neighbors in a cultural way, they have never advanced to the absurd position of feeling that this superiority lies in their germ plasm or that their racial or biological traits are inherently superior to those of other peoples. Thus, throughout their long history the Chinese are not known to have discriminated either by law or by custom against any other people mainly on the basis of skin color or any other physical trait. They have developed no caste system. Nor have they hesitated to intermarry with other races; in fact, they have done so wherever they migrate and wherever the laws of the land allow.

Still another interesting cultural fact about the Chinese people is their failure to develop religious fanaticism. Confucianism, a native product, is a religion only by courtesy of those writers who somehow feel it is unusual for a nation to exist without one. It has no priesthood and no theology; it is frankly not concerned either with the "soul" now or the life hereafter; and there is no worship in the western sense of the word, and moreover no preaching. Instead, it teaches, mainly through the parents and the school-teachers, that man as man has enough dignity without extraneous additions; and that to be a good and useful man and to be at peace with one's self and with other men is the summum bonum of this mundane existence. Because of this great emphasis upon humanism and upon this world, the Chinese seldom quarrel seriously with other people over religious matters.

There is, however, one kind of reality which the Chinese know and on which they stake their existence, and that is what they consider as the desirable codes of social conduct. While few Chinese, if any, have sacrificed their lives for any particular religious faith, many have died for the people they love and respect and for the mores and customs that in their eyes make life meaningful. In this they not seldom went to extremes. Thus, a minister of the late Manchu Dynasty committed suicide in the early days of the Chinese Republic. In his will he said he had died for the

government he served and that he wished the ministers of the new government would be equally loyal. Acts of this type in relation to one's country and government are known as *chung*, or loyalty.

Chinese sons have mutilated themselves if they think they have been in some way responsible for their parents' deaths, and generally would consider it a matter of life-long regret if their parents, while still living, should be unhappy because of them. Sentiments of this type are known as *hsiao*, or filial piety.

"Scholars are willing to die for their friends," goes another very popular saying. Keeping one's word to one's friends or associates and coming to their aid in time of need are some specific items of the general code among friends known as *hsin*, or mutual trust.

I have briefly touched upon only three of the five classical social relations that constitute the social universe of the Chinese, the other two being relations between husband and wife and between brothers or relatives. Each of these relations is regulated by codes that have existed for centuries, violation of which is considered as a very serious matter. The well-known phenomenon of "face saving"—which is often spoken of in derogatory terms by Westerners—is simply another version of the extreme sensitiveness to social reality on the part of the Chinese.

The Basic Chinese Character

If one stops to reflect on the facts of Chinese cultural history briefly enumerated above, one cannot help observing a note of nonaggressiveness or nonassertiveness running through them all. Nor can one help asking whether underneath there is not a basic Chinese character or personality structure that is essentially noncombative, one that is characterized by no great urge toward perfection or absolute mastery or undisputed success but by a highly developed sensitiveness to human feelings and a very great concern about personal relations.

These psychological tendencies may or may not be the stuff out of which world peace is made, for while they may be considered as possible contributions to world peace, military weakness in the midst of aggressive neighbors is a standing invitation to invasion, and the job of building a new world probably will require something more than passive, defensive attitudes. My own belief is that the American and the Chinese cultures have much to contribute to each other in the years that lie ahead and that cultural planning can do much toward the achievement of world peace and a world civilization.